

INTRODUCTION

Anna Agata Kantarek

Anna Franta

The condition of contemporary cities is the subject of numerous activities, projects and reflections.

On the one hand, we have to deal with hitherto unprecedented urban expansion. 54% of the Earth's population lives in cities. We build new cities and expand the existing ones. Cities and their complexes grow spatially, forming large areas and absorbing new territories. On the other hand, we realize to what extent our rational activities are imperfect and do not keep up with the basic needs of the inhabitants of the Earth.

We are aware of a number of trends that are happening in parallel, pulling cities in opposite directions. We see the growth of large urban areas and the shrinking (Shrinking Cities) or fall of others; we observe an escape from rural areas to cities and an escape from cities in search of life close to nature; we are aware that not only do we build new towns, but we lose the existing ones as we demolish the historical environment with its cultural richness, as well as the chance to preserve the cultural identity of communities.

The definition of a modern city of today refers to both megacities and small towns - a small town means a town with no more than half a million inhabitants. But perhaps the question about the definition of forms of a contemporary settlement seems to be more important nowadays than the question of the definition of the city itself. Traditional divisions between the space of a village and the space of a city cannot be seen clearly. Criteria for distinguishing between a city and a village are vague – neither the size nor the basic form of occupation of its inhabitants is a good and easy criterion for this distinction.

Management of the territory of the Earth has become an increasingly conscious comprehensive activity, not only due to the concern for the environment and the sense of sustainability, but also in view of the global awareness of the interconnectedness and considering the possible opportunities for further relations.

We live in an era of special growth of non-spatial relationships through the development of possibilities of information transfer by electronic media. The virtual world is growing, basing on the real one and changing it in a fundamental way. Negation of the real, three-dimensional space can be seen in many modern methods of spatial planning and design, and mutual assimilation and fusion of the real and virtual space go not without difficulty.

Virtual forms of settlement? Do they exist alone, without the three-dimensional layout of the material base?

And urban settlements - from the smallest mountain village to an extensive area of a megapolis - could they do without the virtual world?

The answer to both question is “no”, and it stands for a necessity to search for a proper synthesis.

The four-dimensional (three space dimensions plus time) reality will always be the basis for man's worldly existence, although the virtual world is changing it deeply. This three-dimensional, spatial reality, dynamic and changing over time, has its own structural rules. Formed successively by generations to implement various functions and uses, it has its own principles of composition in urban and architectural scales. Exploring both the modern interpretation of these principles in the changing realities of human perception and determining the possibility of orientation in space of the city is the basic research level.

And another question, which relates to the condition of modern man. To what extent do we identify our inner life - mental, spiritual, supernatural – with the virtual world? Doesn't the excess of information and relations in the external world that we experience destroy our inner autonomy?

Here the answer is “yes”.

Only problems adjusted in this way - man confronting a modern virtual and real settlement, constitute an appropriate perspective for our deliberations.

That's why we ask about the meaning of the city and about its axiology!

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